



Georgia and Ukraine in the Kremlin's Policy

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Abstract: The Russian Federation believes that the post-Soviet region is strategically important and considers it to be the exclusive zone of its influence. Each of the former republics occupies a specific place in its foreign and security policy. In the following article the author has made an attempt to determine the place of Georgia and Ukraine in the aforementioned policy. It was made by analyzing Moscow's policy towards them, including actions that clearly enabled the implementation of a strategic political turn towards the West, which for the Kremlin would mean a gradual loss of influence in the area of the former USSR.

Keywords: Georgia, Ukraine, Russian policy, post-Soviet area.

Introduction

The President of Russia opened a new chapter in relations with the West through his speech at a conference in Munich in 2007. He filled the western world with consternation by openly demanding equal treatment for Russia and the cessation of meddling with its internal affairs. In the face of such an assertive Russian stance, the American administration felt obliged to respond to the speech, in which they detected elements of the cold war rhetoric, and it was decided to speed up the process of NATO's enlargement by admitting Georgia and the Ukraine.

At the beginning of 2008, to the surprise of its European allies, Kyiv, inspired by Washington, turned to NATO with a request to include Ukraine in its Membership Action Plan (MAP). At the same time, Washington made its intention clear to include Georgia in the MAP as well. From Moscow's point of view, this was a drastic crossing of a certain boundary and a threat to its security interests. Georgia, similarly to Ukraine, had always had a special status in the Russian em-

pire and the former USSR. Georgia was conquered by Russia in 1801, but it was as early as in 1812 that Piotr Bagration, the descendant of a Georgian dynasty, became a hero of the war with Napoleon and was mortally wounded during the battle of Borodino. At the top of the leadership of the USSR there were many people of Georgian origin, including Joseph Stalin and Sergo Ordzhonikidze (People's Commissar of Heavy Industry in the 1930s), as well as the chief of the NKVD, Lavrenti Beria. Stalin was born in the Georgian city of Gori and his figure divides both the Georgian and Russian society even today. In 1956, after the 20th congress of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) during which Nikita Khrushchev debunked the cult of Stalin, protests took place in Tbilisi which resulted in casualties. Stalin was very popular among Georgian political elites. Vasil Mzhavanadze, a long-time secretary of the Georgian communist party in the period of 1953–1972, participated in a plot against Khrushchev and advocated keeping Stalin's museum in Gori. Stalin's monument was not destroyed either after the debunking of his cult or the breakup of the USSR,¹ and is still there today. On the other hand, in the final years of the USSR, Georgia was the center of destabilization and de-sovietization. Georgian cinematography, painting, music, and theater were an important part of the Soviet culture. The film "Repentance" by Tengiz Abuladze, directed in the Georgian language in 1984 before Gorbachev's perestroika, was the first film presenting the era of Stalinism and was a ground-breaking event in Russian cinematography, as well as an important artistic event with political meaning. In 1987, the film won a Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival. This is a story of the life and activity of a dictator who resembles Stalin and Beria at the same time. In the final scene, the son of the dictator throws his corpse out of its grave.²

The First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, Eduard Shevardnadze, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR at the end of the 1980s, together with Gorbachev was the architect of the Soviet foreign policy which contributed to the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

Ukraine was of even more importance to Russia. The sensitivity of Putin and of the Russian political elites concerning this country can be easily understood. It is strongly embedded in historical experiences. In order to reach the vast Russian territory and attack the center of power in Moscow, which Napoleon's France, and the imperial, fascist Germany tried to do, it was necessary to first enter the territory of Ukraine. Thus, it plays the role of a buffer state of vital, strategic importance. Therefore, no Russian leader can tolerate Ukraine's political and military alliances with states considered by Russia to be enemies.

The Kremlin cannot also be indifferent to a situation in Ukraine where there is a center of power championing integration with a western alliance. Washing-

¹ Natalia Antelava, "Stalin Still Revered in Georgia," *BBC News*, December 21, 2002, accessed December 16, 2017, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2596671.stm>.

² *Pokajanie [Repentance]*, directed by Tengiz Abuladze (Tbilisi: Kartuli Pilmi studio, 1987), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdiZCRH9Vj4>, with English subtitles, accessed December 18, 2017.

ton probably does not like Moscow's stance, but the USA should understand this geopolitical logic. Great countries are always oversensitive to potential threats in the vicinity of their territory. The United States would also not tolerate a situation if another superpower—even one that is geographically distant—deployed its military potential in the western hemisphere, not to mention close to their borders. One can imagine the outrage and reaction of Washington if China attempted to build a political or military alliance with Canada or Mexico. Russian leaders informed the authorities of western states many times that the enlargement of NATO by the accession of Georgia and Ukraine was unacceptable to Russia.³

The aim of this article is to determine the place of Georgia and Ukraine in the policy of the Russian Federation. Research has been undertaken to answer the question: What place does Georgia and Ukraine take in the policy of the Russian Federation? Theoretical methods such as source and literature criticism, analysis, synthesis and inference have been used in order to answer these questions.

Disagreements between the Allies over Ukraine and Georgia Joining NATO

At the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, Vladimir Putin issued a warning that if Ukraine and Georgia joined the Alliance, it would result in their division.⁴ France and Germany realized the implications of the consequent threats and blocked the MAP.⁵ Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Nicolas Sarkozy, referring to Ukraine, argued that the majority of Ukrainian society was against membership, while in the case of Georgia, its leader Mikhail Saakashvili was not a real democrat. His actions were to prove this to be true. In November 2007, he closed the biggest opposition TV channel and broke up a rally of protesters who opposed his leadership. Another justification for such a course of action was the unstable situation in Georgia with its two unresolved border conflicts – in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. If these conflicts evolved into a military confrontation, in

³ See John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (September/October 2014): 77-89, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>; Mirosław Minkina, "NATO i UE w nowej rzeczywistości po aneksji Krymu [NATO and the EU in the New Reality after the Annexation of Crimea]," *De Securitate et Defensione. O Bezpieczeństwie i Obronności* 1, no. 1 (January-June 2015): 9-16, accessed December 16, 2017, www.desecuritate.uph.edu.pl/images/De_Seuritate_nr_11_2015_Minkina.pdf.

⁴ "Putin ne zjavljal o tom, chto Ukraina ne javljaetsia gosudarstwom [Putin Did Not Claim that Ukraine Is not a State]," *Segodnya.ua*, April 18, 2008, accessed December 13, 2017, <http://www.segodnya.ua/ukraine/putin-ne-zjavljal-o-tom-chto-ukrainane-javljaetcja-hocudarctvom-ctenohramma.html>.

⁵ Steven Erlanger and Steven Lee Myers, "NATO Allies Oppose Bush on Georgia and Ukraine," *New York Times*, April 3, 2008, accessed December 13, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/03/world/europe/03nato.html>.

the case of the implementation of the MAP, the North Atlantic Alliance would be forced to react in line with the provisions of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.⁶

At the summit, there was almost a scandal. The stance of France and Germany resulted in fierce criticism. The leaders of the Central and East European states declared openly that Sarkozy and Merkel were being bribed with Russian gas. The strongest words were, however, directed at the German minister of foreign affairs, Frank-Walter Steinmeier. He was told that after what Germany did in the 20th century it did not have any moral right to stand in the way of the freedom of East European countries.⁷ The dispute lasted during supper and into the next day. Quoting eyewitnesses, Mikhail Zygar reports, that the argument between Angela Merkel and Condoleezza Rice, the US Secretary of State, was a very interesting event. The two women—the only women present at the summit—were standing aside and loudly arguing in Russian, the language which they both know perfectly well.⁸

Finally, a compromise was reached. It was decided that Georgia and Ukraine would not be included in the MAP program, and at the same time they were promised full membership of NATO but without a clearly determined time perspective. However, the compromise was not satisfactory either for Georgia or for Ukraine, or for Russia. Saakashvili and Putin, who came to Bucharest on the last day, were outraged. Resignation from the MAP had already been agreed, but even this was not acceptable to the Russian president since the perspective of NATO's enlargement by admitting two states from the post-Soviet region had been clearly expressed.

During the meeting behind the closed doors, when the discussion concerned Ukraine, Putin was to tell Bush: "Ukraine, generally speaking, is not a state. A part of its territory is Eastern Europe, and a part—a significant one—is a gift from us. If Ukraine joins NATO, it will be without the Crimea and its eastern region – it will simply fall apart."⁹ At that time, not many paid attention to Putin's threat since everyone focused on the escalating clash between Tbilisi and Moscow. Nobody, at that time, believed or anticipated an actual conflict between Russia and the Ukraine. Another factor contributing to the lack of reflection on the threat was the upcoming inauguration of the new president, Dmitry Medvedev, which was to be held the following month, on May 7.

The War with Georgia

The policies of the new president were largely a continuation of the policies of his predecessor. Medvedev attempted to increase the social support base for

⁶ Mikhail Zygar, *Vsya kriemlevskaya rat'. Kratkaja istorija sovremennoj Rossii [All the Kremlin's Army: Brief History of Contemporary Russia]* (Moscow: Alpina Digital, 2016), 207.

⁷ Zygar, *Vsya kriemlevskaya rat'.*

⁸ Zygar, *Vsya kriemlevskaya rat'.*

⁹ Zygar, *Vsya kriemlevskaya rat'.*, 208.

the administration with liberal intelligentsia and the citizens of municipalities. He also sought the improvement of relations with the West. His first diplomatic initiative was presenting the draft of a new treaty on European security at the end of 2009. In accordance with the points proposed in the document, the new European security architecture would not be based on NATO but on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations (UN).¹⁰

However, the activity that preoccupied him the most during the first months of his presidency was the war with Georgia which had started as a response to Saakashvili's actions aiming at establishing control over South Ossetia. Just after the end of the summit in Bucharest, the tension increased due to the concentration of the Georgian army close to the border with Abkhazia. As a response, Russia enlarged the military contingent of its so-called peacekeeping forces there and began to hand Russian passports to the citizens of Abkhazia and South Ossetia on a large scale. At the end of May, the Kremlin deployed its railroad troops to Abkhazia, which evoked a strong protest from the West including the OSCE and the EU. Moscow justified the move by the need for the rebuilding of Abkhazian infrastructure and providing humanitarian aid.¹¹

In the beginning, Medvedev tried to open a new page in Russian-Georgian relations. During his first meeting with Saakashvili in Saint Petersburg in June 2008, he declared that he was ready to restore good, bilateral relations without looking back on the past.¹² But during the second meeting in July in Astana, the atmosphere of talks was not that friendly. That was a clear proof that Russia had planned military operations against Georgia much earlier. Many different authors have tried to reconstruct the course of events leading to the outbreak of this war. Their analyses indicate that Russia had been preparing for the war for some time past. Certain events might suggest that.

Prior to the military operations, Russia had launched a massive cyber attack paralyzing the Georgian governmental portals. Carrying out such an operation requires earlier preparations. Russia was already experienced in a "denial-of-service" attack when in the spring of 2007 it blocked banking and governmental servers in Estonia.

It was a weird coincidence that, just before the breakout of the war, large Russian military maneuvers known as "Caucasus 2008" were carried out close to the Georgian border. In the exercise, held on the territory of South Ossetia, the

¹⁰ "The draft of the European Security Treaty," the website of the President of the Russian Federation, November 29, 2009, accessed January 14, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/6152>.

¹¹ "Medvedev i Saakashvili schitajut, chto nerashaemych problem v otnoshenii RF i Gruzii net [Medvedev and Saakashvili think that there are no insoluble problems between the Russian Federation and Georgia]," *Izvestia*, June 6, 2008, accessed December 16, 2017, <http://izvestia.ru/news/427048>.

¹² "Medvedev i Saakashvili schitajut, chto nerashaemych problem v otnoshenii RF i Gruzii net."

forces of the 58th Army, stationed in Northern Caucasus, were supported by the forces and materiel of the Black Sea Fleet. The official aim of the exercise was to improve the skills of combating terrorism in a mountainous terrain, but such a scenario was a perfect fit for the operation of invading another country. The maneuvers officially ended on August 2nd. Simultaneously, the Russian media carried out a disinformation campaign. In order to diminish the importance of the undertaking, the media reported the participation of about eight thousand soldiers, 700 tanks and armored personnel carriers, dozens of aircraft and some helicopters.¹³ In fact, the number of engaged personnel and military equipment was much larger. At the end of these military maneuvers, the forces did not return to where they had been previously stationed. Not only did they remain in place but they were quickly strengthened and enlarged to 80 thousand soldiers and members of paramilitary formations, out of which 60 thousand would take part in war operations.

Four thousand citizens were evacuated from the capital of South Ossetia Tskhinvali to Russia. The evacuation was carried out in a planned and organized way, which proves that it was coordinated by the authorities.¹⁴ At the same time, about five thousand journalists of the Russian media appeared in the city, as well as in the metropolitan TV station.¹⁵ It seems that the Russian preparation for the invasion of Georgia had begun over two years before. During this period, geopolitical and strategic goals were formulated. The main geopolitical purpose was the elimination of all structures of Georgian statehood from South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In this way, the separatist republics were to become independent, and then integrated into the Russian Federation. The planned military attack on Georgia was, on the one hand, to prevent the country from joining NATO, and, on the other hand, it was a clear message for Ukraine that membership in NATO could mean a war with Russia. Such an action was intended to undermine the effectiveness of the North Atlantic Alliance's defense umbrella, as it would not be able to mobilize its resources for a non-member state. The plan of the operation against Georgia also had long-term strategic goals. For Russia it was a priority to increase control over the most important fuel pipelines. If it was possible to place a pro-Russian government in Georgia, the Kremlin could control the oil pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, which transports oil from the deposits located by the Caspian Sea to Europe bypassing Russia, as well as the South-Caucasus pipeline called Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum, transporting natural gas from the Shah Deniz

¹³ "Krupnye vojennye uchenija "Kavkaz-2008" prochodiat na juge Rossii, Pervyj kanal [Massive Military Exercises "Caucasus 2008" Are Going on to the South of Russia, Channel One]," July 20, 2008, accessed December 16, 2017, http://www.1tv.ru/news/2008-07-20/186261-krupnye_voennye_ucheniya_kavkaz_2008_prohodyat_na_yuge_rossii.

¹⁴ Marcel H. Van Herpen, *Putin's War. The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 242.

¹⁵ Herpen, *Putin's War*.

gas field in Azerbaijan to Turkey.¹⁶ A pro-Russian government in Tbilisi would mean controlling the transport corridor of gas, oil, and other natural resources, connecting Central Asia and Azerbaijan with the Black Sea and other reservoirs. In 1999, western concerns reached an agreement with the states of Central Asia concerning the construction of the oil pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, which began to be used in 2006. The pipeline allowed Azerbaijan, as well as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, to become independent of the Russia-controlled pipelines and to transport oil from the Caspian Sea through Georgia and Turkey, bypassing Russian territory. The Russian-Georgian alliance would enable the control of Azerbaijan from the west and north, making it difficult at the same time for the United States to station armed forces and intelligence assets on the territory of this country. It is worth mentioning that until the annexation of the Crimea, Azerbaijan pursued a definitely pro-western policy.¹⁷

On 8 August 2008, when world leaders were participating in the Olympic Games opening ceremony in Beijing, Russian tanks crossed the Georgian border. The night before, fighting between the Georgian armed forces and the military formations of South Ossetia broke out. Troops on both sites used machine guns, grenade launchers, and mortars. On the 8 May at 04:00 the Georgian artillery of the 4th infantry brigade began a twenty minutes artillery bombardment, after which the land forces took up arms and started capturing districts in Ossetia. In the morning, after capturing the cross-border villages, the Georgian troops entered the capital of South Ossetia, Tskhinvali.

The immediate Russian reaction was overwhelming, which might confirm the earlier hypothesis on the planned operation against Georgia, or on having intelligence concerning the decisions of Saakashvili and the Georgian armed forces. At about 1 am the troops stationed near the border with South Ossetia were given orders to regroup in the direction of the Roki Tunnel,¹⁸ connecting North and South Ossetia, about 60 km from Tskhinvali. The 58th Russian Army stationed in Vladikavkaz quickly gained advantage over the Georgian forces. It consisted of

¹⁶ Ariel Cohen and Robert E. Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2011), 2.

¹⁷ Since 2014, Azerbaijan started to walk away from the West. Lack of faith in its political effectiveness and the growing pressure of Russia forced Baku to isolate itself from the world. The policy exercised by the authorities was more and more distant from the expectations and plans of the western states. In the context of the conflict in Ukraine, Azerbaijan revised the balance of powers and the regional policy. For the West and Russia, Azerbaijan is the key country of South Caucasus given its natural resources (oil and gas) as well as demographic potential. Azerbaijan supported Georgia during the gas conflicts with Russia in 2007 and 2008. See Aleksandra Jarosiewicz, "Azerbejdżan – narastający problem dla Zachodu [Azerbaijan – A Growing Problem for the West]," *Komentarze* no. 146 (Warsaw: Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich [Centre for Eastern Studies], 15 September 2014).

¹⁸ Michail Barabanov, Anton Lavrov, and Viaczeslav Celuyko, "Tanki avgusta. Sbornik statyey [The Tanks of August: A Compendium of Articles]," *Centr Analiza Strategiy i Tehnologiy* [Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies], 2009, 57.

the 19th and the 42nd mechanized divisions and the 98th Air Assault Division. The 76th Assault-Aviation Division was also redeployed from Pskov. Moreover, the 33rd Mountainous Battalion, trained to operate in the Caucasus region, took part in the operation as well. On the third day of the war, Russia opened a second front of operations – in Abkhazia. The following troops operated there: the 7th Airborne Division, the 76th Assault-Aviation Division, marines of the Black Sea Fleet, as well as the 20th Mechanized Division from Volgograd. According to different sources, the war involved around 35 to 40 thousand soldiers, about 300 combat aircraft and two naval craft.¹⁹ The Georgian forces amounted to 12-15 thousand soldiers, 8 Su-25 attack aircraft, and 20 helicopters. Aviation, however, did not play a major role in the conflict.²⁰ With a considerable numerical advantage and convenient starting positions for operations, the Russian forces prevented the Georgian troops from achieving any of their goals – taking control over the route leading to Tskhinvali and blocking the key Roki Tunnel. After the capture of the capital of South Ossetia, the Georgian forces clashed with the 135th and the 693rd regiments of the 58th Army north of the city. Georgia threw its most valuable forces into the fight—the 2nd and the 4th brigades—which resulted in leaving the western part of the country defenseless. The situation was taken advantage of by the Russian forces which did not encounter any resistance when entering Abkhazia. In the city of Senaki they destroyed the infrastructure of the 2nd Brigade engaged at that time in South Ossetia. They also captured the Georgian Black Sea base in Poti. The defeat of Georgia was assured from the beginning of the conflict, mostly due to the fact that the Roki Tunnel had not been blocked.²¹

The operations of Russian forces were supported by a war in cyberspace. 28 Internet sites were attacked both in Georgia as well as in the western states, including the official portal of the Georgian president, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Central Bank, the parliament, the highest court, as well as the embassies of the USA and the United Kingdom in Georgia. It seems that the attacks were centrally coordinated. They began on the 8 August at 05:15, were repeated every 30 minutes, and ended on 11 August when the Russian forces announced a ceasefire. As a result of the negotiations by the President of France, which at that time held the EU presidency, the Russian forces did not enter Tbilisi.

Along with cyber-attacks, Russia undertook disinformation activities attempting to impose its own version of events upon the world. According to their interpretation, Georgia, and its president in particular, was the aggressor, while Russia was the victim of the aggression. Moscow was forced to intervene in defense of Russians living in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in order to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe. Moreover, they insisted that the West and the USA did not have

¹⁹ Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War*, 11.

²⁰ Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War*, 12.

²¹ *Voyna na Kavkaze 2008: russkiy vzgljad. Gruzino-osietinskaja vojna 8–13 avgusta 2008 goda [War in the Caucasus 2008: Russian Views. Georgian-Ossetian War of August 8-13, 2008]*, ed. A.D. Cyganok (Moscow: AIRO-XXI, 2011).

any moral right to criticize, since they had launched military interventions in Kosovo and other regions of the world.

The conflict with Georgia lasted five days. According to Agnieszka Legucka, such a swift end to the conflict meant that Russia had attained its political goals by preventing the progress of NATO's enlargement in the Caucasus.²²

Russia's "niet" to Ukraine's European Aspirations

As has already been mentioned, from the point of view of Moscow's security and politics, Ukraine is of even greater importance than Georgia, and in the context of its pro-European aspirations the crisis, which took place after almost one hundred years since the beginning of World War I, was unavoidable. It meant *de facto* a new form of confrontation between the superpowers, i.e. the West with the USA in the leading role and Russia.

During the night of 21/22 of February 2014, an agreement concerning a political solution to the crisis in Ukraine was reached. The document was signed by the president of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich as well as the leaders of the opposition – Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Vitali Klitschko, and Oleh Tyahnybok. The foreign ministers of France, Germany, and Poland were the guarantors of the agreement. Also, a representative of the Russian Federation, who was present in Kyiv, participated in the meeting. The compromise was, however, not accepted by the protesters at the Maidan in Kyiv. Yanukovich, deprived of the support of his power base including the law enforcement departments, escaped from Kyiv together with few of his co-workers, first to the Crimea, and then to Russia.²³

Protesters gathered at the Maidan at the end of 2013. They demanded: the choice of the European way for Ukraine, respect for civil rights, and opposition to the corruption of the authorities. The crowd in Kyiv was supported by some oligarchs as well as nationalist groups. After Yanukovich's escape, the goals of Ukraine's foreign policy were clearly expressed, and included integration with the EU and Euro-Atlantic institutions. The new Ukrainian identity that the protesters demanded was to be built on the rejection of the Soviet and imperial past of Russia as well as on the primacy of the Ukrainian language and culture.

The governments and public opinion in the West welcomed the Ukrainian revolution with satisfaction, seeing it as a victory for European values as well as proof of the attraction of western democracy and its market economy. During the events at the Maidan, the representatives of the USA and the EU member

²² Agnieszka Legucka, "Konflikty zbrojne jako instrument wpływu Federacji Rosyjskiej na obszarze poradzieckim. Wnioski dla Ukrainy i Polski [Armed Conflicts as an Instrument of Influence of the Russian Federation on the Post-Soviet Area. Consequences for Ukraine and Poland]," in *Polska – Rosja. Perspektywa sąsiedzka [Poland – Russia. Neighborhood Perspective]*, ed. Mirosław Minkina and Malina Kaszuba (Siedlce, Poland: Siedlce Pracownia Wydawnicza Wydziału Haministycznego UPH, 2015), 23.

²³ "Krym. Vozvrashchenie domoy. Specialnyi reportazh [Crimea. Returning Home. Special Reportage]," (TV Center, 24 March 2014), available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4x_1Ek4nSYc, accessed November 20, 2017.

states openly took the side of protesters, trying to persuade the President of Ukraine to agree to concessions, and warned him against the use of force against his own citizens. The Maidan was not only treated as the democratic expression of the protest of Ukrainians against a corrupt state, but also as a protest against the Moscow-oriented foreign policy. The direct reason for the riots was Yanukovich's decision on November 2013 not to sign the already prepared agreement on the association of Ukraine with the European Union. The president was afraid of the political and economic costs as well as the threat to his office in the context of presidential elections due to be held in 2015. Obviously, this decision by the head of the Ukrainian state was influenced by the Kremlin which had sent unambiguous signals of dissatisfaction to Kyiv. It was argued, by Russia, that any association with the EU would bring serious harm to the economic cooperation between the two countries, while joining the Customs Union with Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus would significantly invigorate the Ukrainian economy.

Yanukovich had a huge problem in trying to make a decision. At the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014, he suspended the process of association with the EU and turned to Moscow with a request for financial support, which was granted immediately. In December 2013, Russia declared its readiness to provide financial support in the amount of 15 billion USD, out of which 3 billion would be transferred immediately.²⁴ The Ukrainian leader hoped that it would be possible to maneuver between Russia and the EU, without having to make a final decision. A kind of competition between the West and Russia commenced, in which what was at stake was a European country that was second in terms of the size of its territory and seventh in terms of the number of citizens – Ukraine.

The association agreement between the EU and the Ukraine and the subsequent establishment of a free-trade zone did not mean much. The road from association to membership in the EU was still long, but it was impossible for Russia to ignore the symbolic step in terms of politics and geopolitics. The fact that Ukraine was leaving the historical Russian sphere of influence and its pro-western orientation meant a fundamental shift in the eastern part of Europe. Both Europe and Russia realized how meaningful the change was. In this way, Moscow's hopes to create the Euro-Asian center of political and economic influence on the basis of the former USSR region were undermined. Without Ukraine, the Russian integration plan did not make any sense. Russia assumed that the Ukrainian example of overthrowing the existing power would be an inspiration for anti-systemic movements in other countries, e.g. Armenia, Belarus, and even in Russia itself. At the same time, it seemed that counter revolutions were gaining new energy and motivation. The events in Kyiv were shocking for Moscow. Putin's policy towards Ukraine was based on the historical approach and the thesis of the organic and historical unity of the Russian world (*Russkiy mir*). He re-

²⁴ "Rossiya vlozhyt 15 mlrd doll. v cennye bumagi ukrainskogo pravitelstva [Russia will invest 15 billion dollars in securities of the Ukrainian Government]," *UNIAN*, December 17, 2013, accessed November 20, 2016, <https://economics.unian.net/stockmarket/864591-rossiya-vlozhit-15-mlrd-doll-v-tsennyie-bumagi-ukrainskogo-pravitelstva.html>.

peated it many times, including, *inter alia*, at the meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club in September 2013, when he claimed that “Russians and Ukrainians constitute one nation.”²⁵ At the same time, the Kremlin pursued a systematic and pragmatic policy aiming at the membership of Ukraine in the Euro-Asian Union, and the authorities in Kyiv were the only partner and ally of the project. The essence of this project was putting Yanukovich, who was never fully trusted in Moscow, in a situation in which only one choice was possible – the alliance with Russia and the membership in the Euro-Asian Union.

Yanukovich, who was always guided by private interests and not the good of the state, escaped from Ukraine. At the same time, the representatives of the western states negotiating the association agreement, were not able to restraint the Maidan's emotions after its signing. In Moscow, the situation was perceived as the United States entering the political game, with US agents provoking clashes in Kyiv between protesters and the law enforcement services. According to Russia, American agents deprived the president of Ukraine of the support of the power ministries and pushed Europe away from having any influence on the course of events at the Maidan. What is more, the Kremlin concluded that Ukraine had not only separated itself from Russia, but was also being transformed into an American stronghold, from which it would be possible to carry out an operation of exerting pressure on Moscow at all levels – political, economic and, finally, the military one. In this situation, a decision was taken to carry out the annexation of the Crimea. Russia also attempted to provoke riots in south-west Ukraine which were to be of an “anti-Maidan” character. The operation, however, turned out to be ineffective. It was only in Donbas, in May 2014, that they managed to organize a referendum which resulted in the creation of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic which did not recognize the new administration in Kyiv. The Ukrainian authorities tried to counteract this by taking full control of the separatist republics and this became the cause of a conflict lasting until today and produced an area of destabilization. The conflict evolved fast into an open confrontation between Russia, the USA and the American allies from NATO. The regions which did not recognize the administration in Kyiv could not be fully pacified due to the economic, military, and diplomatic support provided by Russia.

At the same time, it should be remembered that the Ukrainian administration, appointed after the ousting of Yanukovich, also took part in this course of events. However, the authorities made a few basic political mistakes. They failed to convince and attract the Russian-speaking part of society that was skeptical about the change of administration.²⁶ A few short-sighted laws and political dec-

²⁵ “Zasedaniye mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba «Valday» [Meeting of the International Discussion Club ‘Valday’],” website of the President of the Russian Federation, September 19, 2013, accessed November 20, 2017, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19243>.

²⁶ Vladimir Solovjev and Nikolay Zlobin, *Russkiy virazh. Kuda idet Rossiya?* [Russian Turn: Where is Russia Going?] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2014), 169.

larations were produced, such as the prohibition of the Russian language (which was soon lifted), the promise of a speedy entrance into NATO, the termination of the agreement on the stationing of the Russian fleet in the Crimea, and the banning of the Party of Regions and the Communist Party of Ukraine. Arrest warrants were issued for the head of the Supreme Council of the Crimea, Vladimir Konstantinov, the prime minister of the Crimea, Sergey Aksyonov,²⁷ and Rear Admiral Denis Berezovsky – the commander of the Ukrainian naval forces, who had sworn allegiance to Russia.²⁸ In Donetsk, the governor Pavel Gubayev was arrested.

The administration in Kyiv made one mistake after another. They did not take into consideration the ethnic diversity of Ukraine, and they perceived the situation only through the prism of the Maidan. They did not make any effort to visit the east and the south-east to talk, to ease the tense situation and to calm everything down. The nationalistic Right Sector should also have been disarmed, and the use of extreme nationalistic rhetoric and fascist symbols should have been banned. The memories of World War II and the atrocities of soldiers as well as the security forces of Nazi Germany were still too vivid in the Ukrainian society, and especially for the Russian-speaking people. Consequently, they lost the confidence of a great part of society, which maybe did not support the change of power, but also had not acted aggressively against it. Regardless of the reliability of the election mechanism, it might be assumed that the erroneous decisions of the new administration in Kyiv contributed largely to the result of the referendum in the Crimea.

In the meantime, western countries openly and firmly supported the Ukrainian administration which had gained legitimacy in the elections in May and October. In the West, there was no doubt that only Russia should be held responsible for the crisis in Ukraine. This conviction was only made stronger by the shooting down of a Malaysian Airlines passenger plane over Donbas by the pro-Russian militants in June 2014. The political condemnation of Russia's activities was supported with economic and financial sanctions, the strengthening the eastern NATO flank as well as with increased confrontation.²⁹ In the spring and summer of 2014, what had been a qualified relationship between Russia and the West—although far from ideal since the end of the Cold War—transformed into

²⁷ "Aksenov: arest Kievom imushchestva Kryma– vystrel vcholostuju [Aksenov: Arrest by Kyiv of Crimean Property – A Blank Shot]," *Vesti.ru*, March 16, 2015, accessed January 6, 2018, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=2430256>.

²⁸ "Kontr-admiral Berezovskij pytalsia zachvatit' stab VMS Ukrainy [Rear Admiral Berezovskij Tried to Seize the Headquarters of the Ukrainian navy]," *Fakty i Kommentarii*, March 3, 2014, accessed January 6, 2017, <http://fakty.ua/177790-kontr-admiral-berezovskij-pytalsya-zahvatit-shtab-vms-ukrainy>.

²⁹ Vide Marta Stempień, "Interesy wywiadowcze Federacji Rosyjskiej na Bliskim Wschodzie w kontekście konfliktu syryjskiego [Intelligence Interests of the Russian Federation in the Middle East in the Context of the Syrian Conflict]," *Secretum 1*, no. 4 (2016): 119-130.

a new form of conflict and the growing isolation of Russia. The specter of military confrontation was revived again.

The Breakthrough in the Foreign and Security Policy of the Russian Federation

The year 2014 was earth-shaking for Russian foreign and security policy. It turned out that the two geopolitical concepts that had existed during the period between 1989–2014, i.e. an orientation towards Europe and, alternatively, towards Asia had turned out to be of limited use.

The concept of a European orientation was formulated at the end of the Soviet era. It presupposed economic, political, and social reforms transforming Russia into a state similar to the western democracies, integration with the Euro-Atlantic institutions (including NATO and the EU) as well as an equal partnership with the USA.³⁰ Despite attempts to put these assumptions into practice—by Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin (in the first years of his presidency) and Dmitry Medvedev—they had never been realized. It is worth noticing that the fast pace in which the declared partnership transformed into a confrontation in 2014 proves, without any doubt, that it did not mean much and it was actually always in a state of constant crisis. The development of an alternative concept—orientation towards Asia—also did not prove to be successful. In January 2015, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) was officially established, but the actual scope of the integration was very different from the assumed intention.³¹ The idea of a large organization, fully integrated in terms of politics, economy, and law, as well as the pursuit of a common security policy has not been realized. Ukraine, which was to be its key state, did not find a place there. As a result, the EAEU is a shaky structure, within which only partial economic integration functions, and it has been unable to become the world center of power under the leadership of Russia that it had hoped to be.³²

According to the Kremlin, there were many causes for the crisis in Ukraine. One of them was the lack of political understanding between the collapsing USSR, and later Russia, and the West. In the period of 1989–1991, no meeting between the East and the West similar to the Congress of Vienna or the Yalta Conference was convened, although it could have been an ideal solution. There were attempts to regulate the new order in a contemporary way. In November 1990, the Charter of Paris for a New Europe was signed, which was to set new rules for relations between the European states. Also at that time, the Treaty on

³⁰ Dmitriy Trenin, *Rossiia i mir v XXI veke* [*Russia and the World in the Twenty First Century*] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2016), 14.

³¹ Vladimir Putin, "Novyi integracyonnyi proekt dlja Evrazii – budushchee, kotoroe rozhdaetsia segodnia [The New Integration Project for Eurasia: The Future Born Today]," *Izvestia*, October 3, 2011, accessed November 28, 2016, <http://izvestia.ru/news/502761>.

³² Trenin, *Rossiia i mir v XXI veke*, 15.

Conventional Armed Forces in Europe was signed with the goal to prevent any unexpected mass conventional attack. In addition, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), functioning since 1975, was transformed into the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

The crisis in Ukraine is in fact an expression of the collapse of the Soviet world. The outcome of the referendum in the Crimea evoked a powerful reaction in the western world and in many other countries around the world. The Peninsula's annexation prompts the thesis that the process of the USSR's dissolution has not yet been fully completed. Empires collapse—as history proves—in the course of long and agonizing processes. Many administrative borders do not correspond with historical, ethnic, cultural, religious, and economic borders. Their shape was determined by earlier geopolitics and today the borders of countries created after the breakdown of the Soviet Union run against logic, contradicting the reality. The post-Soviet area is a region which is very unstable, characterized by political improvisation. It will continue to reveal tendencies to create new states and correct existing borders. The Crimea is a precedence and, unfortunately, it is impossible to exclude the likelihood that other states of the former Soviet Union, including Russia itself, will not want to make use of this precedence. At the end of the 20th and the beginning of 21st century, borders changed and new states were established also in the territories beyond the former USSR. The scenario of events will largely depend on whether there exist effective instruments protecting against counter revolutions, as well as against the economic factor.

It will be very interesting to see in which direction the situation in Ukraine will develop. Despite the support of the West, it can be supposed that it will pose a serious problem both for the USA and Western Europe.

Unlike other Soviet satellite bloc states, Ukraine has the potential to build nuclear weapons, and to do so in a short space of time. The West is worried about Ukraine's resentment concerning their forced renouncement of the possession of a nuclear arsenal.³³ There are certain political and intellectual circles in Ukraine that believe the Crimean scenario would have never taken place if they had not renounced the possession of nuclear weapons. They refer to North Korea towards which the international community does not take any radical steps aiming at overthrowing the authoritarian regime and which constitutes an oddity in the contemporary world.

If a country with serious economic problems—and the problems will not disappear quickly—had at its disposal nuclear weapons, there would be no other choice but to neutralize it through the membership of NATO. For it is not possible to leave it beyond international control, and membership of the Alliance would make its control much easier.

³³ Anthony Zurcher, "Ukraine's nuclear regret?" *BBC News*, March 20, 2014, accessed January 6, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-echochambers-26676051>.

Taking into consideration the fact that, after the loss of the Crimea, the Ukrainian political elites have shown attitudes of revenge and retaliation, Ukraine will be a difficult, and demanding, ally trying to play its own game. In this situation, the USA and Western Europe will face a real challenge if the Ukraine were ever to become a member of NATO. It means that the geopolitical order in the post-Soviet region shaped after the breakdown of the USSR will have to be seriously revised in the context of the Ukrainian situation. Unfortunately, probably no one presently assumes such a scenario.

The activities of the Russian Federation towards the Crimean Peninsula made the West face a new, surprising problem – how to react to the referendum, and then the annexation of the Crimea. It is already known that the situation got out of hand. It was the failure of intelligence, experts, and intellectual elites. It is all the more striking that professional, analytical centers in the West, highly appreciated for their predictions, did not notice even the smallest signs of the later development of events until the last moment. It was not even noticed that the chairman of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of the Crimea Volodymyr Konstantinov announced that the peninsula wished to join Russia.³⁴ It seems that the West took the statement as a bluff. Almost all the possible mistakes typical of intelligence analysis were made, including:

1. A lack of empathy, namely the lack of an ability to understand the views and the perception of interests of the Russian society in the Crimea;
2. Intentional neglect of proof, namely ignoring, *inter alia*, the moods and statements of the members of the Crimean Duma; thus, information contrary to the views previously held was rejected, and it was assumed that the Crimea was still a part of Ukraine;
3. Hypothesis of a rational actor (an assumption that others will act in a rational way, similarly to the assessing party), wishful thinking (optimism resulting from the excessive trust in one's own perception and analytical abilities), defensive avoidance (refusal to notice and understand particularly dangerous symptoms as well as avoiding difficult choices leading to wishful thinking), reluctance to take into consideration probability (tendency to avoid assessments of particularly small probabilities). This array of many mistakes in one meant the assumption that the Russians would act in a rational way—similarly to any democratic state—and that they would not decide to act irrationally by moving borders and breaking the memorandum signed in Budapest in 1994 which

³⁴ Dina Ivanova, "Vossoyedineniye s Rossiey: krymchane chotyat vosstanovit' istoricheskuyu spravedlivost [Reunion with Russia: Crimeans Want to Restore Hystorical Justice]," *Vesti.ru*, March 7, 2014, accessed January 6, 2018, www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1355622&tid=106314.

gave Ukraine the guarantee of territorial integrity in exchange for the waiver of the ambition to possess nuclear weapons;³⁵

4. The mistake of analogy as well as the syndrome of considering the events, experiences, and data from the past as coinciding with the development of events taking place presently.³⁶ The West counted on the fact that the Crimean scenario would develop in the same way as the situation in the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia which definitely wanted to join the Russian Federation but were not given permission to do so, a situation that has not changed today. The diplomacy and the western intelligence services assumed that Russia, even if it occupied the Crimea, would create a pseudo-independent country, which would not be incorporated into the Russian Federation. However, it became obvious, very quickly, that Moscow did not intend to play out such a scenario.

Conclusions

Both Georgia and Ukraine occupy an important place in the policy of the Russian Federation. Ukraine is particularly crucial due to its location. In the opinion of the Russians, their domination over Ukraine would make it possible to extend their influence basically to the whole of Europe. The loss of this state could threaten Russia's vital interests, including its security. The historical experience and the sense of the cultural and civilizational community also play a significant role. The economic partnership existing between the two countries is also relevant, taking on the form of a specific addiction in some branches of the economy, e.g. in the armaments industry.

In the case of Georgia, its geographical location on the Black Sea, between Eastern Europe and Western Asia is of great importance for Russia. From the point of view of the Russians, it is important to use the eastern Black Sea coast, which is located on the territory of Abkhazia, for the operational capabilities of its armed forces. Despite its lack of energy resources, the location of Georgia makes it an important player in energy diplomacy. The Kremlin, due to its interests in the post-Soviet area and the strive to rebuild its superpower position, would like to subordinate both countries, which were once part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The proof of such action can be found in both the war with Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Both cases prove that the Federation will not release these countries from its influence, even at the expense of engaging in armed conflict. They are too important in the policy pursued by Moscow.

In the context of these incidents, it seems that the international community, especially the West, can hardly interfere with the implementation of Russian

³⁵ Mirosław Minkina, *Sztuka wywiadu w państwie współczesnym [The Art of Intelligence in the Modern State]* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza "Rytm", 2014), 160–162.

³⁶ Minkina, *Sztuka wywiadu*.

goals. Today, it is even more difficult than it was in 2008 when Russia also managed to attain these set objectives. Now the economic and geopolitical reality has changed. Namely, the world economic crisis has been tackled, but the various events and political factors having negative influences on the world economy are taken with greater caution and limited optimism. The sanctions imposed on Russia are criticized by economic and political circles, and there are more and more voices calling for their abandonment.³⁷ What is also important is the effort of the Russian Federation aiming at avoiding isolation by the intensification of relations with BRICS states, and especially with China. One thing is certain – Moscow will never allow itself to lose its control and influence in the post-Soviet region. The case of Georgia and Ukraine supports this thesis beyond doubt.

About the Author

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³⁷ Finian Cunningham, "Europe Revolts Against Russian Sanctions," *Strategic Culture Foundation*, May 16, 2016, accessed January 6, 2017, <http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2016/05/26/europe-revolts-against-russian-sanctions.html>.